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# THE LESSON FROM LAWRENCE

BY W. JETT LAUCK

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MUCH has been said and written about the labor disturbances at Lawrence. The fundamental significance of the situation there has yet to be explained. The conditions in this textile-manufacturing center, serious as they have been, have more than a local import, and if the American people are wise they will devise measures of general relief for the industrial conditions of which the ebullition at Lawrence is typical.

It has been pointed out with emphasis, and it cannot be denied, that the woolen and worsted mill owners have been guilty of sham and hypocrisy in demanding a high tariff for the protection of the American mill operative, when, as a matter of fact, the so-called American wage-earner does not exist. Instead of a protective tariff serving as a bulwark for American standards against the "pauper labor" of Europe it has been made clear that the American mill-hand has not only been exposed to the direct competition of a cheap, alien labor-supply from the south and east of Europe, but, because of his inability to work under the same conditions and at the same wages as the recent immigrant, has been forced to leave the woolen-goods manufacturing industry. The inadequacy of the earnings of married men; the need for wives and children to work; the lack of an independent form of family life, due to the necessity of taking boarders and lodgers in order to supplement the earnings of husbands; the poor housing facilities and the highly congested living conditions; the segregation of the alien textile operatives, their inability to speak English, and their failure to develop any political or civic interest—all these and many other lamentable facts relative to working and living conditions in Lawrence have come to light as the result of the present strike.

The point, however, which the American people have not yet grasped and which is of fundamental importance is that the situation at Lawrence is not unique. It is typical. It is representative of all our important industrial centers. The fact which cannot be over-emphasized, and which the intelligent citizen must bring himself to realize, is that the working and living conditions which have been shown to exist in Lawrence are found in all of our industrial localities in the north and west, no matter upon what branch of manufacturing or mining they are dependent.

The United States Immigration Commission during its recent and exhaustive industrial investigation attempted, with great care, within the territory east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio and Potomac rivers, to discover a purely American industrial community. It was forced to acknowledge the effort a failure. No manufacturing or mining locality of any importance could be found which did not have its immigrant colony of industrial workers from southern and eastern Europe.

The foreign or immigrant communities in the North and West, which have come into existence because of the recent influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, are of two general types. The first type is a community which has, by a gradual process of social accretion, affixed itself to the original population of an industrial town or city which had already been established before the arrival of races of recent immigration. Foreign communities of this type are as numerous as the older industrial towns and centers of the country, any one of which in New England, the Middle States, or in the Middle West or Southwest will be found to have its immigrant colony or section. The second type of immigrant community has come into existence within recent years because of the development of some natural resource, such as coal, iron ore, or copper, or by reason of the extension of the principal manufacturing industries of the country. They are usually communities clustered around mines or industrial plants; often practically all of the residents are of foreign birth, the population being composed of Slavs, Italians, Magyars, and other peoples of recent immigration. Illustrations of this type of immigrant communities are common in the bituminous and anthracite coal-mining regions of Pennsylvania, and in the coal-producing areas of Virginia, West Virginia,

Alabama, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, and Oklahoma. In the Mesaba and Vermilion iron-ore ranges of Minnesota, as well as in the iron-ore and copper-mining districts of Michigan, many towns and cities of this character are found. Although not so numerous, they are not infrequently established in connection with the leading industries, such as the manufacture of iron, steel, glass, cotton and woolen goods, etc. Numerous communities of both types might be mentioned, but the foregoing examples will serve to set forth the general situation.

In discussing the Lawrence labor difficulties much stress has also been laid on the fact that the operatives in the Lawrence mills are principally of southern and eastern European or Oriental races. The same class of wage-earners, however, make up the operating forces of all our mines and factories. The Immigration Commission secured original information for over half a million employees in twenty-one leading industries. It found that three-fifths were of foreign birth, and of these two-fifths were members of races from the south and east of Europe. This striking situation becomes more apparent when the percentage of foreign-born employees in the principal divisions of industry are shown. The proportions in twenty-one branches of mining and manufacturing are as follows:

Name of Industry.	Percentage Foreign-born Employees.
Agricultural implements and vehicles.....	59
Cigars and tobacco .....	32
Clothing .....	72
Bituminous coal mining .....	61
Railroad construction work .....	76
Copper mining and smelting .....	65
Cotton goods .....	68
Furniture .....	59
Glass .....	39
Gloves .....	33
Iron and steel .....	57
Iron-ore mining .....	52
Leather .....	67
Oil-refining.....	66
Silk-dyeing.....	75
Silk goods .....	34
Shoes.....	27
Slaughtering and meat-packing .....	60
Sugar-refining .....	85
Woolen and worsted goods .....	61

From the foregoing figures it can readily be seen that the racial composition of the Lawrence mill-workers is but a replica of all other industrial employees. The principal immigrants among our industrial workers, taken as a whole, are the French-Canadians, Croatians, Russian and other Hebrews, North and South Italians, Lithuanians, Magyars, Poles, Portuguese, Russians, Slovaks, and Slovenians.

The characteristics of these alien industrial workers are also the same as those who live and work in Lawrence. The southern and eastern European is normally of a simple mind and of a peaceable disposition. He is usually tractable almost to the point of subserviency. When aroused, however, he will dumbly follow a leader to any length, often to the point of extreme violence and disorder. The developments at Lawrence have shown this characteristic in a pronounced form. Three years ago it was similarly displayed in the strike of the employees of the Pressed Steel Car Company at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, when the recent immigrants refused, under the influence of the Industrial Workers of the World and under the leadership of the same men who were recently in Lawrence, to return to work even after the native American strikers had reached an agreement with the employers.

Another quality of the recent immigrant labor-supply which is purely industrial, but which is no less important, is that only a very small proportion have had any industrial training or experience before coming to the United States. The great majority were farmers or farm laborers before they were transplanted to their industrial environment in this country. Furthermore, they possess but small resources from which to develop industrial progress and efficiency. Unlike the immigrants of former years from Great Britain and northern Europe, the southern and eastern European wage-earners in other industries, as in the case of Lawrence mill-operatives, are unable to speak English. They are also characterized by a high degree of illiteracy. Of 250,000 industrial workers for whom information was received by the Immigration Commission, only fifty-three per cent. could speak the English language. Among certain races, such as the Bulgarians, Macedonians, Greeks, Herzegovinians, Montenegrins, Roumanians, and Turks, the proportion who had acquired an ability to speak English was much smaller. About one in six of the same employees of

mines and factories cannot read or write in any language. Furthermore, the Bosnians, Bulgarians, Croatians, South Italians, Portuguese, Servians, and Turks are marked by an even higher degree of illiteracy.

The standards of living of the recent immigrant wage-earner are everywhere as low as in Lawrence. The recent immigrant males being usually single, or, if married, having left their wives abroad, are able to adopt a group instead of a family living arrangement, and thereby to reduce their cost of living to a point far below that of the American or older immigrant in the same industry or the same level of occupations. The method of living usually followed is that commonly known as the "boarding boss" system. Under this arrangement a married immigrant or his wife, or a single man, constitutes the head of the household, which in addition to the family of the head, is usually made up of two to sixteen boarders or lodgers. Each lodger pays the boarding boss a fixed sum, ordinarily from \$2 to \$3 per month, for lodging, cooking, and washing, the food being usually bought by the boarding boss and its cost being equally shared by the individual members of the group. Another common arrangement is for each member of the household to purchase his own food and have it cooked separately. Under this general method of living, however, which prevails among the greater proportion of the immigrant households, the entire outlay for necessary living expenses of each adult member ranges from \$9 to \$15 each month. The additional expenditures of the recent immigrant wage-earners are small, and every effort is made to save as much as possible.

A normal form of family life—wife and children supported by the earnings of the husband—is as uncommon in other industrial localities as in Lawrence. The family income must needs be supplemented by the earnings of children or by the payments of boarders and lodgers. The wages of the heads are not sufficient. As a consequence, the native Americans depend upon the contributions of wives and children employed outside the home to supplement the earnings of the husband. The recent immigrants, owing to the comparatively small number of children, rely for their additional income upon the receipts from boarders and lodgers. As a result of its intensive study of the families of 15,000 industrial workers of different geographical areas and of the

leading divisions of mining and manufacturing, the Immigration Commission found that only two-fifths of the families derived their entire incomes from the earnings of husbands. About one-eighth of both the native American and immigrant families were supported by the wages of the husbands and the earnings of wives and children, and one-fourth of the immigrant households depended upon an income from boarders and lodgers. In the case of some families the heads of which were from southern and eastern Europe, as high a proportion as four-fifths received part of their income from the contributions of boarders and lodgers.

This situation may be more quickly realized when its effect upon housing and living conditions is considered. A study by the Immigration Commission of the families of 17,000 wage-earners, both native Americans and aliens, employed in all lines of industrial activity, showed that one out of every three had boarders or lodgers. In more than one-half of the households with Croatian, Russian, Magyar, Roumanian, Ruthenian, Servian, and Lithuanian heads there were boarders and lodgers. The average number of boarders and lodgers among native Americans was 162 for each 100 households as against 345 in each 100 immigrant households. The Croatians had an average of six, the Servians seven, the Bulgarians eight, and the Roumanians twelve boarders or lodgers in each family.

As might be expected, this condition of affairs causes a high degree of congestion within the households. In the 17,000 investigated there was an average of 246 persons for each 100 sleeping-rooms. Among some families of southern and eastern Europeans all the rooms of their apartments were used for sleeping purposes, and no provision was made for a kitchen, dining, or living room. More than one-third of all the families had only one room available for general living purposes. The low standards of living and the congested living conditions are further exemplified by the rent payments of the families of the industrial workers. The average monthly rent for each person in 11,000 families was found to be only \$1.60, and in the cases of some of the southern and eastern European households, notably the Bulgarians and Macedonians, it ranged as low as 78 cents each month per person. The standards of living indicated by these small rent payments is too evident to require comment.

↪ The significance of the situation at Lawrence is therefore

obvious. The class of wage-earners in Lawrence—recent immigrants, unable to speak English, of low standards of living, without industrial experience and unable to know proper working conditions—are the same as are found in all branches of mining and manufacturing in the United States. In brief, although the general level of wages is somewhat lower in Lawrence than in some other branches of manufacturing, the general conditions of life and work are the same. In other words, the status of the wage-earner and his family in Lawrence is typical of the so-called American wage-earner in general. As a consequence, the question as to what we are going to do about the situation in Lawrence quickly resolves itself into the more general inquiry as to what we are going to do about the entire industrial situation. This is the significance of the whole matter. The Lawrence strike is settled, but unless more than local treatment is administered, it will rise again to vex us and a hundred similar instances will follow in its train. The public welfare as well as the condition of our industrial workers demands that measures be taken to prevent the development on a national scale of the conditions which have been characteristic of the strike of the Lawrence woolen and worsted mill operatives.

In order to point out remedial measures it is necessary to inquire into the causes of the industrial situation in which we find ourselves. They are not difficult to ascertain. The remarkable expansion of mining and manufacturing and the consequent demand for labor which have been characteristic of the past thirty years, have attracted to our industrial localities millions of untrained, inexperienced, non-English-speaking, illiterate, temporary immigrant wage-earners. The extraordinary inventions of machinery and mechanical processes during the same period of time have eliminated the elements of skill formerly required of industrial workers and have made possible the extensive employment of this cheap, alien labor supply from the south and east of Europe and the Orient. With the influx of this new labor force, conditions of employment have deteriorated, labor organizations of the original employees have been inundated and disrupted, and the native Americans and older immigrant employees from Great Britain and northern Europe, finding themselves unable to compete with the low standards and the rates of



payment acceptable to the recent immigrant workmen, have segregated themselves into certain occupations or have sought other employment. The greater number have now been displaced, and the immigrant workmen themselves, who a few years ago drove out the native Americans, are now finding it difficult to withstand the competition of the Syrian, the Turk, and members of other races of more recent arrival from their own countries or from the Orient. In other words, our industrial system has become saturated with an alien, unskilled labor force of low standards, which so far it has been found impossible to assimilate industrially, socially, or politically, and which has broken down American standards of work and compensation.

The obvious solution consists in imposing a check upon a further addition to this labor-supply until those who are already at work in our mines and mills can be absorbed and elevated to a point where they will demand proper wages and working conditions. If the alien influx is permitted to continue it will mean a further degradation of the industrial worker and the intensifying of the conditions of unrest and dissatisfaction which offer such fruitful ground to the Socialist and other revolutionary and radical propagandists. McKees Rock and Lawrence are object-lessons in this respect. We shall do well if we heed their teachings. A temporary restriction of immigration would not imply any racial discrimination or deviation from our traditional policy of offering an asylum to those who are politically or religiously oppressed.

Whether we have a restriction of immigration or not, we must educate and assimilate the recent immigrants who are already resident in our cities and towns and who are workers in our mines and industrial plants. The astounding fact in connection with the presence of a large immigrant population in all of our industrial communities has been the complete indifference of the native Americans to its existence. This attitude must be changed. Every possible agency must be brought to bear upon the effort to Americanize the alien. There is almost an unlimited field for service, and the recent immigrant will be found to be quickly responsive, and unless something is done the violence and anarchy which have already occurred are only an earnest of what we may expect in the future.

W. JETT LAUCK.